Cape Hatteras Lighthouse As I Knew It

By Rany Jennette

My Dad, Unaka B. Jennette, The Last Principal Keeper

Unaka B. Jennette was born in the village of Buxton, North Carolina in 1882. As a very young man, he sailed with his father aboard the sloop Defender, hauling supplies to Hatteras Island from Elizabeth City or Washington, North Carolina. At the age of 22, he joined the Lighthouse Service as a deck hand on a buoy tender for thirty dollars a month.

It was only natural that Unaka would choose the Lighthouse Service as a lifetime career, as did two of his brothers. The Jennette family has been associated with the lighthouse since the purchase of the land from four Jennett(e)[1] orphans around the beginning of the nineteenth century, for the original 1803 lighthouse tower.

Due to his knowledge of navigation and his leadership ability, he had rapid advancement in the Lighthouse Service. During his career as Master of Lighthouse Vessels, he earned his license as First Class Pilot for Chesapeake Bay and its Tributaries. His home port was Baltimore, Maryland. The highlight of Captain[2] Unaka Jennette's career came in 1919, when he received a transfer to the Hatteras Lighthouse, as principal keeper. He welcomed the opportunity to be closer to his family and aging parents on Hatteras Island. The present, venerable lighthouse was built in 1870, after serious damage was inflicted on the 1803 lighthouse during the Civil War.

He took his responsibilities maintaining the lighthouse seriously. For example, his fearless dedication to painting it compelled him to rig a ladder from the upper deck of the light tower, lasso the lightning rod, and pull himself up so he could paint the very top of the 208-foot-high lighthouse.

Lighthouse keepers were paid their salaries once each month. As Principal Keeper, my father received one hundred fifty-seven dollars ($157.00) a month. These were the depression years and that was not a bad salary.

Captain Unaka devoted 20 years of his life maintaining the Cape Hatteras Light[house]. The United States Coast Guard took over the service in 1939, and lighthouse keepers were given the option of joining the Coast Guard or transferring to another station. Captain Unaka chose to remain as a principal keeper, and transferred to a screw pile lighthouse in Roanoke Marshes near Wanchese (Roanoke Island), North Carolina, approximately 60 miles north of Hatteras Lighthouse. Old shipmates and assistant keepers have

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[1]The terminal e was added to the Jennett family name sometime in the early 1900's, but the story behind it is not known.

[2]By tradition Captains may retain and use their title for life. Many Hatteras Islanders knew Unaka as "Cap'n >Naka."

told me that he was the best captain they ever served under.

Unaka Jennette is remembered as being a mild-mannered person, who was firm in his leadership and fair in his dealings with everyone. He was highly respected by co-workers and island people. In addition to being a lighthouse keeper, Unaka was a loyal husband to his wife, Jenny Luanna [nicknamed Sudie], and together they raised seven children. He was also an excellent horseman who could bring a wild pony to its knees or throw a steer!

The principal keeper had the same duties as his two assistant keepers in the operation of the lighthouse -- twenty-four hour duty every seventy-two hours.

Jennette Genealogy

The first Cape Hatteras Lighthouse was built in 1802, 600 feet southeast of the present Lighthouse, built in 1870. The four acres of land on which to build the first Lighthouse was purchased from four orphaned children: William, Mary, Jabez and Aquilla Jennett --legally described as "infants under the age of twenty-one years, to whom their mother, Christian Jennett, hath been duly appointed guardian." The United States Treasury Department paid the purchase price of $12.50 per acre for the land.

Principal keepers and assistant keepers with the family name Jennett(e) date back to the year 1842.

Principal keepers were: Joseph C. Jennett 1842
Benjamin C. Jennett 1868
Unaka B. Jennette 1919

Assistant keepers were: William R. Jennett 1860
Wallace R. Jennett 1863
Joseph E. Jennett 1869
Zion B. Jennett 1889

Two brothers of Unaka B. Jennette were keepers of other Lighthouses:

Cape Henry Lighthouse (VA)	Utah C. Jennette
Rock Point Lighthouse (??)	Alaska D. Jennette

The assistant keepers who served with Unaka Jennette at Cape Hatteras Lighthouse were:

Charles Fulcher
James O. Casey
William E. Quidley
Amasa Quidley
Adolphus Fulcher
John Stowe
Julian Austin
John E. Midgette
Thomas Wallace

When Unaka Jennette and his wife, Jenny Luanna, moved into the principal keeper's quarters in 1919, they had two children, Almy, born in 1913, and Vivian, born in 1916. During their twenty years' [sic] residence in the principal keeper's residence, five more children were born: Myrtle, in 1919, Rany in 1921, Olive in 1924, Dorcas in 1927, and Ramona in 1929.

The Lighthouse Site

The area at the lighthouse today is quite different from that which I remember in my young days. There were no dunes. The beach was mostly flat and undisturbed. The dunes one sees now are basically man made, started by the Civilian Conservation Co. (CCC) and the Works Project [Progress] Administration (WPA) in the 1930's, and expanded by the National Park Service in the l950's. The hoofprints of livestock or the occasional car track was soon covered by blowing sand, due to the seemingly ever-present wind. Seashells were in abundance. North and west of the dwellings there was a large, deep pond and sedge. The eastern end of the pond was clear and free of growth of any kind, with a sandy bottom and small beach. [On] the flat beach overwash was very frequent, thus depositing sand in and around the eastern edge. As you moved further west the pond became sedge (a grasslike or rushlike type plant), with much growth and various forms of plant and animal life. Flags, cattails, pond lilies, fish, frogs, turtles, ducks, and cottonmouth moccasins all inhabited this environment.

Looking south, you would see the old tower hill, site of the first lighthouse built in 1803, with the remains of the structure covering the mound. Constructed of rock, slate and sandstone, these remains were claimed by a storm in 1980. A mile south was the site of the old Hatteras Life Saving Station, and a few hundred yards southwest were three fish camps used by local commercial fishermen. Looking south and southwest from the lighthouse could be seen just flat land. The forest of pines that are seen now were planted by the CCC boys in the thirties.

On the north edge of the big pond there were garages for the keepers' automobiles, pens for hogs and chickens, and vegetable gardens. A sandy, twisting and turning car track led to the village of Buxton. Small hills and mounds covered with yaupon, wax myrtle, and scrub oak grew beside the trail. The Lighthouse Servicenter and the Red Drum Tackle Shop are located on a site that was known as the Head of the Sedge.

Around the lighthouse dwellings there was a wire mesh fence, which was kept white with whitewash, supported by reinforced concrete posts. A broad concrete walk led from the principal keeper's house to the lighthouse. There were more narrow walkways around the buildings. Originally this walkway was brick and it is assumed still is but covered with fill over the years[3]. The lawns were grass and clover kept neatly trimmed by a reel push-type mower, and livestock which roamed freely over much of the island.

The area between the lighthouse and the dwellings has changed over the years. Fill has been placed and the grounds raised considerably. I can remember when there were two or three steps up to the porch of the double keepers quarters and it would be a struggle for a small child to raise himself to the top of the

[3]Fill was brought in by the CCC and NPS in the 1930s and 1950s to mitigate problems with standing water after storms.

cisterns.

Each keeper had a storehouse. Rope, paint, feed for his animals, tools and other items were kept here. It was also used as a wash house. The only water supply was stored in cisterns that were kept refilled by rainfall. There was no inside plumbing so outside privies were necessary. These were three-holers: large, medium, and small. Built by the government, they were considered deluxe models, of course! A coal bin, divided into three compartments, was located behind the double keepers quarters. Each family had their own supply, furnished by the Lighthouse Department of the U. S. Treasury Department[4]. Woodpiles were also a fixture on the grounds. Separate from the house, there was a summer kitchen. With ninety degree temperatures and humidity about the same, generating more heat in the main house could be very unpleasant. However, in the winter it was a welcome addition to the other heat sources such as fireplaces and the Heatrola[5]. Portable kerosene wick lamps and one Aladdin-type mantle lamp was the lighting system.

The Lighthouse

The lamp was lit one half hour before sunset and extinguished at sunrise. A kerosene-burning mantle lamp was the prime source of light. A vapor light, this was located in the center of a first order Fresnel lens which was about twelve feet in height and about six feet in diameter, and structured with over a thousand pieces of heavy glass prisms and bull's-eyes. The bull's-eyes were about twelve inches in diameter, twenty-four in number, convex or convex-concave, thick magnifying glass. The light was visible from twenty or twenty-five miles at sea, and even though it had a rotating lens, at that distance it gave evidence of a flashing light with a unique pattern: a 1.5 second flash and 6 seconds eclipse or darkness. Close up, its twenty-four sheets of light were visible at the same time and gave the appearance of a giant lighted fan revolving slowly from the top of the tower.

Kerosene for the lamp had to be carried to the top of the lighthouse tower by hand in five-gallon cans. Clockworks had to be oiled and lenses inspected for smudges or spots and cleaned, necessary. Touching the lens with fingers was never allowed. The lenses were cleaned with alcohol every thirty days, and with powdered rouge [a jeweler's polish], using a camel's hair brush, each six months.

The clock mechanism that powered the rotation of the lens operated much like the old grandfather clock. Weights attached to a cable, riding on a circular track, descended through the center of the lighthouse, wound around a steel drum beneath a train of clock-type gears, in mesh with a platform on which the lenses were mounted. The complete mechanism was locked in place by a brake. When the brake was released, the weights began their descent, rotating the drum, actuating movement to the great train, and thus revolving the lenses.

A governor controlled the speed of descent of the weights and the sequence of operation to the lens

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[4]The names Lighthouse Department, Lighthouse Establishment, and Lighthouse Service were used interchangeably but apparently none were ever made official by Congress.

[5]A brand of coal stove.

platform. The speed of descent was very important; any variation in speed would alter the sequence of the light and confound the seamen aboard ship off the shoals, who identified each lighthouse by the pattern of its signals from the ship's charts. Using a stopwatch, the keeper on duty would time the rotation several times each watch.

When there was major work to be performed at the lighthouse, a crew of men would be sent down from the Portsmouth, Virginia Depot. These men were all employees of the Lighthouse Department and were known as "the Lighthouse Working Party," all specialists in different areas of maintenance; carpenters, painters, blacksmiths, and lampists.

I remember when the addition was built on the principal keeper's quarters, two large rooms on the ocean side of the building, bedroom upstairs and dining room downstairs. A buoy tender, towing a house barge, anchored in Cape Channel. The barge was loaded with the materials for the building and also served as living quarters for the building crew. (Later they moved into the First Assistant's quarters for the duration of the project.) This was 1927. I saw this same operation repeated in 1930 when the Lighthouse Department decided to place steel groins, or jetties, 900 feet seaward in front of the lighthouse, in order to trap sand and build the beach. W. F. Lynch was foreman on these projects and lived with us. He and my father had been friends for a long time.

Sometimes the lighthouse would need to be given a complete painting, and sometimes just a touch-up. Touching up was usually done by the keepers. A bo'sun chair would be rigged from the rail of the tower with a block and tackle, and one keeper would swing out on the side of the structure. The other two keepers would man the lead line to move him up or down.

A complete painting required a different arrangement. A paint box about twenty feet long by six feet wide, with a four-foot rail, would be used. This box was built to conform to the contour of the circular lighthouse, and would accommodate four people. My father would raise and lower this box by tying the lead line to the bumper of his car. If the painters needed to be raised, he would move forward, and if they needed to be lowered, he would go in reverse.

I remember on one occasion four local young fellows were hired to paint the lighthouse. In a short while they were carrying on in a playful manner and not paying much attention to the job at hand. There was white paint in the black areas and black on white in other places. Since these young men were acting up and out of the norm, my father suspected they must have brought some spirits with them or maybe even have tapped the alcohol at the top of the lighthouse, used to clean the lens. Being a man of even temperament and never verbally abusive, he let his actions speak to the problem at hand. Without saying a word, he entered the car, started the engine, and shifted into reverse, at a fast clip for about forty feet. Of course, this dropped the box and its occupants about fifty feet, with a sudden shocking halt to the whole operation. They started screaming and hollering, wanting to know, "Captain, what in the hell is going on?" Then he started lowering the box to the ground, and as they staggered out one by one, he said, "Go to the beach, take a swim, come back sober, and then go back to work." This they did, and their performance was quality. No hard feelings or bitterness, and no one was fired or quit his job.

The Lighthouse Keeper's Son

Growing up at the lighthouse provided me with many good childhood memories. The three families at the lighthouse were, for the most part, quite large, and a mile south of the lighthouse at the Life Saving Station, there were four or five families. Visits were frequent between these neighbors. There have been words written to the effect that lighthouse keepers and their families had a very lonely life; however, we did not have this experience. In fact, just the opposite would be more apt to apply. The lighthouse has always been a favorite place to visit by the village folk so we would have lots of company, especially on Sunday afternoons and the evening hours, when the heat of summer was unbearable in the wooded areas of the villages. Swimming, baseball games, croquet, chasing wild horses and penning them in the yards for breaking to the saddle, and climbing the lighthouse were all a big part of our lives.

As often as I could, I would make the trip to the top with my father and help with some of the routine maintenance. I shined lots of brass in my young days at the lighthouse. This was not without some reward, however. My father would let me take the powerful spy glasses or binoculars and look at passing ships, so close to shore you would see sailors walking on the deck. Shipping lanes were closer to shore then than now. Sometimes I would take an old bed sheet to the top and tear it into small squares. Using string and some sort of weight, I could make many parachutes and toss them from the top of the tower. It was fun to watch them float gently to the ground.

Our means of transportation was by automobile, as it is today. However, there were no paved roads, only winding sand trails which were very soft in most areas. I remember well the Model T Ford, Chrysler, Chevrolet, Buick, and Mormon [Marmon], which were favorites of the keepers. I remember the running boards, steps, for easy access, mud guards, or fenders, high wooden spoke or disc wheels, and small tires with inner tubes. Horse-and-buggy as well as riding horseback were also modes of travel. Slow, but surer over the soft sand. Gasoline was about fifteen cents per gallon, and operating an automobile could be expensive in that day. Usually there was not much need for a car. Going to church, occasional trips to Buxton village to the general store and post office, or a Sunday afternoon ride. An occasional trip to the mainland was an exciting time in our young lives.

We had chickens, hogs, cows, and vegetable gardens. So, like the farmer, most of our food was home-grown and close at hand. Staple foods were purchased at one of the general stores in Buxton and the other villages. This was a monthly trip shortly after payday, referred to as 'grubbing up.' With fresh vegetables from the garden, fresh milk from the cow, and other supplies from the general store, we lived pretty good. Fresh beef was had only occasionally. A local person would slaughter a steer, usually on the beach, skin the animal, cut it into chunks, and peddle it through the village. By this time the flies would be trying to take over.

Life was never dull at the lighthouse for a youngster, with swimming, beachcombing, shell collecting, and baseball games[6]. We had a croquet set in our yard that provided us with many hours of entertainment, young and old alike. Competition was keen between lighthouse families, often resulting in arguments and

[6]Until the 1930s there was room for a baseball diamond on the then-flat beach seaward of the lighthouse.

temporary disputes. Village folks also enjoyed the game whenever they had an opportunity to visit. Another game we enjoyed was quoits, similar to horseshoes, and not having the proper equipment, we used bricks broken in half. The young folks could hardly wait for the weather to get warm enough so they could shed their shoes and socks and go barefooted. This would never be allowed before May 1st, no matter how warm the weather, and swimming was forbidden after just eating, or the expression, 'on a full stomach.'

Lighthouse supplies, such as coal, rope, paint and other materials necessary to the maintenance of the lighthouse, were delivered by a buoy tender. These were the work boats for the Lighthouse Service. The names of these ships I remember well: *Holly, Tulip, Violet, Maple, Mayflower, Jasmine,* and *Speedwell*. The *Speedwell*, I believe, was a sidewheeler. The buoy tender would anchor in Cape Channel about six miles from shore in Pamlico Sound, off the eastern [sic] bank of the island. Most of the captains and chief engineers were old shipmates of my father and they enjoyed the opportunity to visit and talk about old times. My father had to board these ships to check the list of supplies, and, on occasion, would let me go with him. This was a real treat for a young lad.

We would usually have dinner at noontime with the officers, and afterward I enjoyed a tour of the ship. I was especially interested in the engine room, and the clean, shining engines and related machinery never ceased to fascinate me.

Supplies were lightered to shore by the ship's small boats. These boats would be loaded to the gunwales, and then headed for shore to off-load the supplies at an area called the Mail Landing, so called because this is where our mail was brought in from the mail boat. Being so heavily loaded, of course the lighter would run aground about three hundred yards from shore, and then it was overboard for the crew. The materials were transported the remaining distance to land on their backs. They were in waist deep water at times and often very cold, if this occurred during winter. Their pay was about thirty dollars ($30.00) a month. The supplies were then loaded on horse drawn carts for the two-mile haul to the lighthouse. Eventually, Model T and later Model A Ford trucks took the place of the horse and carts.

When major repairs were necessary and the work crew arrived, young folks living in the area at the time of these operations were intrigued by everything these men did. Setting up their various shops, the tools they used, listening to their tales of past operations and places they had been: of course this fascinated children who lived a more or less isolated life, and these city folks were a different breed of cat.

There was 'Blackie' Emerson, the blacksmith who could do wonders with his forge and a piece of iron. He would make canes and forms of various animals out of iron rods.

Mr. Miller, a very large man considered to be the chaplain, was called 'Preacher.' Mr. Miller would have a steamer trunk full of candies of all kinds; I remember the Milky Way candy bar best of all.

Mr. Tarr, who also liked to preach at some of the local churches, made friends with everyone.

There was Mr. Gunnerson, who somehow managed to get enough of the other spirits out of a bottle. I remember one occasion, when there was a big tent meeting at Kinnakeet (Avon). These revivals, as they

were called, were usually attended by people all up and down the Hatteras Island area and drew very large crowds. Usually they would begin in the afternoon with a big picnic spread and last on into the night with fire and brimstone preaching. About midway through one service, Gunnerson and a friend came staggering down the aisle, giving their own version of how a service should be conducted. Naturally, this was very disruptive and drew the attention of almost everyone. They were escorted out of the tent by a few of the Life Savers from Big Kinnakeet Life Saving Station. Needless to say, they were a mess the next day.

The Filipino cook, Teed, took great pride in his ability to prepare meals fit for a king, and to keep a clean kitchen.

Sometimes these men would let me join them for dinner. They were housed in the assistant keeper's quarters which is now the National Park Service Visitor Center. The kitchen at that time is now the library, located on the right rear [northeast corner] of the building.

I will always remember Mr. Lynch, the person in charge of this crew of men, especially the snipe hunt he took me and a friend on one night. Of course we found out later that this was a farce and a trick that had been played on many a young person in the past. We were about ten years old and Mr. Lynch would tell us how great it was to catch snipe in a bag at night. We were intrigued with all the stories and persuaded him to let us try, with his help. One night we carried a large tow bag and five-cell flashlight to the beach and walked the surf to the hill where the old Lighthouse had once stood. Mr. Lynch said, "Boys, you lie down flat on your bellies, one on each side of the bag. Hold the bag open, place the flashlight inside the bag and let it shine down the beach. Be very still and quiet. I will walk down the beach and scare up some snipe. They will see the light and run toward it. Some will probably go in the bag, so close it fast and tight and you'll have some birds." We waited for a long time and became very tired and sleepy. Little did we know that Mr. Lynch had circled back and gone home. We gave up, and when we arrived back at the house, everyone was having a lot of fun over the fact we had been duped. That ended the snipe hunting.

Lighthouses and lighthouse keepers were subject to inspections by the Lighthouse Superintendent from Washington, D.C. Prior to these inspections, there was a beehive of activity all about the premises. Cleaning, polishing, painting, and even the heavy, plush living room furniture being moved to the yard to be exposed to fresh air, was part of the preparation.

One of these inspections comes to my mind more than all the others in my memory. A young friend and I were playing in the lighthouse yard. There was a vat of tar beside the granite steps leading to the entrance of the lighthouse, and being summer, it was very thin and the consistency of paint. There was a paintbrush handy and also a stick nearby. We started painting the granite tiers of the structure with this tar. We were about eight years old and thought we were doing a pretty good job. After all, the lighthouse had just been painted and black paint had been used. Someone had left a brush handy, so why not put the finishing touches on the base? We made a big mess.

The inspector was due and since there was no transportation to Hatteras Island, my father would drive to Norfolk, Virginia, and furnish him passage down the beach. There were no paved roads, and no bridge across Oregon Inlet, so this was the better part of a two day trip. My father spotted the mess we have made just before he left and wanted to know if I had anything to do with it. Of course I said "Yes, sir,"

with a feeling of pride in doing a good job. He said, "I am in a hurry to catch the last ferry and don't have time to deal with this now, but after the inspection is over we will talk about it." I knew by the tone of his voice that there would be more than just a talk, and also, that I would have to wait two or three days to find out the bad news. As soon as he left, I went to my mother and asked whether she thought he would forget this, and her reply to me was, "Your father never forgets a promise." This was not very encouraging and all I could do was wait and suffer.

After the inspection was over, my father made the return trip to Norfolk with Captain King, the inspector. When he came back home he went upstairs to change clothes. In those days men shaved with a straight razor and they sharpened these razors with a leather strap. When he came downstairs he had this strap in his hand and I knew he was not intending to shave. I knew what he had in mind and it had nothing to do with conversation. He took my hand and we headed for the Lighthouse and the scene of the most recent paint job. He said, "Do you see that?" as he pointed to the tar. I said, "Yes, sir." "Well, you are going to remember it the rest of your life, young man." He was right. It has been more than sixty years and I still remember very well the sting of the leather strap. But a spot or two of the tar is still there, and I did leave my mark on the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse for a long time!

In reminiscing about family festivities and customs at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Keeper's Quarters in the early 1900's, I recall that about a week before Christmas Day, preparations would begin with sugar cookies, ginger cakes in squares, and oatmeal cookies with raisins. Extra special was the pineapple cake that all the family loved. The Christmas books were brought out and mother would read *The Night Before Christmas* to all us children.

A cedar tree from the woods would be brought in by the keeper and placed in the corner to the right of the fireplace, and all the family would help decorate it. There were angels with transparent wings, a large, very shiny star to set atop the tree, and real, five-inch candles to clip to the tips of the branches. Soap-flake (Ivory) snow and cotton brought a look of winter to the tree. Mother would make a centerpiece for the oak dining table of large red and green glass Christmas balls and place them on pine and holly boughs. She also made a pine spray for the door and twined the porch railing with pine and holly.

There were seven of us children at the keeper's house. We hung our stockings on the mantel for Santa, except for the two oldest who had to put theirs on a nearby chair because the mantel only had room for five. On Christmas morning, the stockings were found to be filled with fruit, candy, nuts, and raisins. The children looked forward to these treats as much as any other part of Christmas tradition.

On Christmas Eve, the family would dress in their Christmas clothes and go into Buxton to the Methodist church. The whole community would be there. There was a Christmas tree, and each child would receive a gift. The superintendent of the Sunday School would give a bag of candy and fruit to each member of every family in the village, whether they attended the Methodist church or not. Packing these bags before Christmas Eve was a happy get-together for the young adults of the church. A local merchant would make up the order and provide space in his store for the packing. During the service, each child would give a short Christmas speech and the Christmas religious story would be read. After church, the family would go back to their home by the lighthouse. The seven children would go to sleep listening for Santa, to the lullaby of the surf. And sure enough, the next morning Santa would be there, in person in a red suit, beard,

and hat. (Keepers wore many hats!) Each of the seven children received three gifts: a lot for those days. Frequently, the gifts were scooters. Many a shoe sole was worn thin on the cement walks; usually, the left shoe received most of the wear.

Soon it would be time for Christmas dinner. In the early years, the keeper would shoot a wild goose which was served with baked sweet potatoes with nutmeg. The stuffing was prepared with plain bread, red peppers, and sometimes potatoes were added. This would not be stuffed in the bird, but baked separately. For dessert, mincemeat pies and sweet potato pies were served.

Christmas was celebrated up to January 4th, when stockings were hung again on the mantel in celebration of 'Old Christmas' (Epiphany) on January 5th. Again, the children would receive fruit and candy. The custom of 'Old Buck' celebrated in Rodanthe was not celebrated at the Cape, however. After 'Old Christmas,' the tree came down and the star and ornaments were carefully stored away. (Christmas customs by Joan Bartlett in interview with Vivian Jennette Frontis, oldest daughter of Unaka and Jenny Luanna Jennette)

I remember the roundup of horses and cattle on Hatteras Island. These penning operations were for the purpose of dipping the animals in a strong solution of creosote to kill ticks and keep other insects away. Dipping vats were located at convenient points on the Banks, to accommodate each village. A large pen, or corral, would be constructed at the vat site and the animals herded in to await their turn for dipping. The vats were of concrete construction, long, narrow, and deep enough for the animals to swim. They would be herded to the entrance and one-by-one, slide into the vat. Being somewhat narrow, the animals could not turn around in fright, but had to swim to the far end to exit. The exit end of the vat had formed protrusions for good footing up the ramp. When they emerged from the vat, a person would slap them on the rump with a paintbrush swipe of green paint, to show they had been treated. Each owner was responsible for gathering his own livestock. Identification was simple. Horses were branded and the cattle had their ears cropped. Usually it was a combined operation of helping each other. This was a trait of island folks, no matter what the occasion. Since the animals had such a wide range to roam, this penning and roundup could turn out to be a tremendous amount of work. Stock would range up and down the beach and in the wooded areas. Sometimes it would involve riding day and night in order to locate all the animals. Even though I was quite young, sometimes my father would let me ride behind his saddle while looking for a steer or cow and calf. I still have a gall, or scar, on my right leg caused by chafing on the side of the horse. My father owned seventeen horses and forty head of cattle. Getting them to the penning area was quite a task for an adult but an enjoyable experience for a kid.

Later, the State of North Carolina passed the 'No Fence Law,' stating that no animals could run loose on the Banks.[7] Many of the animals were sold to farmers and other mainlanders across Pamlico Sound. They would come in boats of all description and transport them to their homes on the mainland. All stock that had not been rounded up by a set date were found by state riders and sold by the State of North Carolina. I never knew my father to lose control in a given situation, or even display a sign of temper, until

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[7]This law, intended to prevent dune damage, actually took effect in 1937, but was phased in over several years. Until the 1960s many scientists blamed Outer Banks erosion on grazing practices and logging..

the state took a cow and calf that belonged to him. He had searched the woods day and night, looking for these two animals, to no avail. He rode to the penning area, saw the cow and calf there, and a State rider with a rope on each of them. He made a statement to the effect that these were his animals. The State rider let him know that the State had claimed them and they would be sold. This was before the deadline, but these unprincipled persons saw an opportunity to make an easy dollar for themselves. My father did not say another word to them, but got back on his horse, Jim, and rode home to the lighthouse. I can just imagine that the State fellows, with the big hats, riding breeches, and leggings, were thinking that the matter was closed. They certainty did not know who they were dealing with. My father went into the house, picked up his five shot automatic rifle, loaded it, and rode back to the penning area. At a short distance from the cow and calf he took aim and fired two shots, one for the cow and one for the calf. Dead animals were worthless and could only be disposed of by burying. "Now they belong to you, take care of them," he said, and turned and rode away, still true to the creed he lived by. "Right is right and wrong is wrong, no matter how you slice it."

A trip off the island was the most uncertain of events in my young days. There were three routes that could be taken up the beach to Oregon Inlet and the ferry across. Dead low water we would usually drive the surf where the sand was moist and packed very hard. You could make good time and almost as quickly as now. High water, we drove the inside track next to the sound, winding, full of ruts and water, very slow, often three or four hours travel. The other alternative was the bank of the beach itself, making your own track in the sand. Tires were dropped to about twelve or fifteen pounds of pressure for better flotation and traction. Getting a fast start and keeping going was the key to a successful journey. Getting stuck and the passengers, if any, getting out and pushing, occurred often. Leave home dressed with your Sunday best on, and by the time you reached the Inlet, you were most likely to be dirty, sandy and barefooted. Radiator of the car steaming and boiling over, and everyone sorry they had left home pretty much summed it up. Mosquitoes didn't add much to the pleasure of the trip either.

Mail time each day was looked forward to as it is today, only it was much different then. People did not wait for the mail truck to arrive at the Buxton Post Office but went to the Mail Landing to wait for the appearance of the mail boat from Manteo. Young men from the Radio Compass Station, Life Saving Service, and Lighthouse personnel, along with local villagers, gathered at this spot along the shore of Pamlico Sound each day. The boat usually came in sight around 4:00 p.m. I do not know why this gathering occurred; it just seemed to be the thing to do. Oftentimes, while the older folks chatted about nothing in particular, the younger boys would get up a game of sandlot baseball until the cry went out, "There she is!"

A local man had the responsibility of getting the mail off the mail boat and carrying it to the Post Office. When the mail boat anchored some distance offshore, he would pole his small skiff to the anchorage and off-load the gray sacks of mail. When the mail order houses sent out their catalogs, or around Christmas time, this could be quite a haul. He would then pole back to shore and off-load the small boat. Of course, there were many standing around to give him a hand with this chore. Now came the biggest job of all, hauling these sacks of mail to the post office up the sandy trail we called a road. He would manage to get the sacks of mail on his back and start walking slowly toward his goal, his devoted wife walking behind him. Sometimes all you could see were sacks of mail piled on two stubby legs.

A passenger would come ashore from the mail boat on occasion. Could be someone local returning from a visit to the mainland or a stranger on a first visit to the island, most likely a drummer (salesman) calling on local stores. A stranger could be identified almost in an instant, by his speech and walk. A common expression was, "He walks and/or talks proud." The accent was markedly different and walk either very haughty or overly cautious around water or soft sand. A local person would most likely take his shoes off and get out of the skiff before reaching shore, and trudge on down the trail with shoes in hand, going home. The stranger would stay in the skiff until he was sure the boat was at the beach and then very carefully step out, making certain that no sand got in his shoes. A real high stepper!

A favorite tale, told over and over, was about the old mail carrier and the baby in the sack. He was loaded down with all the mail he could carry on his back, and almost to the post office, when one of the bags slid to the ground. When the sack hit the ground, a tiny voice said "Ma-Ma." It scared the old man so bad he dropped the other bags, picked the fallen one up and ran to the post office as fast as he could go. The postmaster said, "What in the world is the hurry?" "Unlock this bag quick, there is a baby inside," said the old man. The time was just before Christmas and someone had ordered one of the new talking dolls.

Our school was located in Buxton Village where the State Yard is now, and just west of the Cape Hatteras Anglers Clubhouse. Grades were one through eleven. The first schoolhouse burned about 1928. No fire department then. Only a bucket brigade from an old hand pitcher pump.

Sometimes we would have to walk to school along the sandy trails, about two miles. Most of the time, however, someone from the lighthouse or the Life Saving Station would give us a ride. After school, we knew it was going to be a long walk back home. Sometimes a car would pass, winding its way along the soft, sandy car track and we could hitch a ride on the running board. No one seemed to mind, as this was a favorite means of transportation for the young boys and girls. There was no lunchroom so lunches were packed and carried to school, usually in brown paper bags. Sometimes we would go across the causeway to C. P. Gray's General Store and purchase a can of potted meat and crackers, topped off with a big sour pickle from the pickle keg. All told, about twenty cents' worth. C. P. Gray was also the school principal and served in this capacity for many years. He was a well educated and intelligent man who has not had an equal to this day in any Dare County School. Stern but fair, with complete control over students and teachers, he knew how to handle a switch in the most effective way.

At recess, morning and afternoon, we played baseball, shot marbles, and played a very simple game of basketball, with an old hoop nailed to a pine tree with a clearing underneath. We also had skis and sleds made from barrel staves, which we used to slide down a steep, pine-needle-covered hill close by the school house. The girls skipped rope and made playhouses with the abundance of straw that was most everywhere.

Lighthouse young folks had an advantage over the village youngsters, in that a portable library was located at the principal keeper's house for use by lighthouse families. This contained books of all description and was furnished by the Lighthouse Department. This library was in rotation with other lighthouses, used for six months, then sent to another lighthouse and replaced by another completely different selection of books. The Lighthouse Department had about six hundred of these libraries that were furnished to lighthouses throughout the country. As a result, these families were exposed to around two hundred books each year.

Lighthouse families were also furnished with a medicine chest containing many different drugs and First Aid equipment. Some of these medicines were sweet spirits of nitre, cough mixture, castor oil, spirits of camphor, coliform liniment, saltpeter, quinine pills, cathartic pills, laudanum, carbolic acid, iodine, glycerine, lacto pepsin, rochelle salts, bandages, and a medical dictionary. Even with all these remedial means at hand, my mother had her own cures for many things; fatback or sow belly and turpentine for nails stuck in feet, kerosene or coal oil for cuts, to name a few.

My childhood memories take me back to many pleasant happenings that could only be true for a youngster growing up under the shadow of such a magnificent and well-known guardian of seamen everywhere as the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. The freedom that could only be afforded by the wide and long expanse of sandy beach and Atlantic Ocean was mine. This sea of blue-green water with its river of ink blue warm water flowing from south to north, named the Gulf Stream, could be as peaceful as a pond and as turbulent as the fury expressed by a woman scorned.

Stormy weather seemed to be a joy to the young folks, with no real sense of fear. A walk along the beach during these hard northeasters could be a rewarding scavenger hunt. Many articles thrown overboard from passing ships, and seashells in abundance, could be found on this broad beach.

Climbing the lighthouse at every opportunity, up and down the steps, and even sneaking a slide down the rail on the lower levels (this, of course, was frowned on by the elders), walking to the top with string and old rags, going out on deck with makeshift parachutes and tossing them over to float gently to the ground or into the ocean. Ah, memories.

There was always a little skiff and flat-bottomed pram on the edge of the big pond behind the quarters. Poling these boats through the flags, cattails and water lilies was truly an adventure. Turtles, ducks, fish, frogs and snakes were the inhabitants and a curiosity to watch and try to catch.

Ducks laid their eggs on little knolls or islands in this pond and often the eggs would roll off into the deep water. A long handled dip net was used to retrieve these eggs and place them back in the nest.

The outdoor privy was located over the big pond behind our house. It seemed that most any time you could see large snapping turtles swimming around the toilet. I would fashion a string and bent straight pin into a hook, with a piece of meat for bait. I would drop this fishing rig through one of the holes and hook me a turtle, let him struggle for a while and then let him go. One day, while I was busy hooking turtles in the old privy, my baby sister, who was about two, poked her head in the door, and asked, "What you doing, Rany, hooking turtles?" I said, "GO AWAY!" She asked, "Can I watch?" and before I could stop her, she had her head stuck in one of the smaller holes and could not get it back out. Needless to say, I became concerned and frightened, and ran to get my father who came and rescued baby.

Another favorite pastime for lighthouse young people was collecting shells and giving them the names of the various animals that were on the island. Shells were in abundance. The broad flat beach made shell collecting easy. Some of these animals were horse (cockle shell), sheep (Scotch bonnet), chicken (scallop shells), all varieties and colors - Jersey giants, Dominic, Rhode Island reds, and white leghorns, pigs/hogs

(olive shell), cow (conch or whelk), bull (helmet shell), dog (moon shell), and cat (baby's ear). Another breed of horse was represented by the heavy clam shell or quahog.

The old Life Saving Service had two Clydesdale horses that were much larger than the average beach horse, and were used to pull the beach cart and boat to the surf for launching, so we designated these as Government Horses. We would build pens out of strips of wood to make certain that the animals were kept separate in their own pens.

Fights between stallions often occurred on the beach, and sometimes right near where we lived. One stallion would see a mare in another stallion's group, and try to cut her out for his own. The fight would begin and the result could be a bloody battle.

My brother owned a large billy goat named Dicey, so named because his hide was white with black spots all over. My brother had a special cart built and a complete harness set for old Dicey and we younger kids delighted in riding around the premises in this cart hitched to the goat. Even though the woodpile was only a few feet from the house, I would hitch Dicey up to the cart, load the wood on, and let him haul us to the door of the house. Dicey was a powerful goat and had very large horns. One of my favorite memories would be to grab Dicey by those horns and watch him swing and shake his head with that powerful neck trying to shake my grip on his horns.

We had two snakes in our area that stand out in my memory, the cottonmouth moccasin and the king snake. These snakes are not the least bit compatible and you might say natural enemies. I witnessed a battle between a cottonmouth and a king snake one day. I was playing in the yard in front of the double keepers quarters, and noticed a squirming mass underneath the house. Not knowing what this was, I called the first assistant keeper to investigate. He came out of the house, took one look, and went to the storehouse and brought out a pitchfork. He placed the tool underneath the object in question and brought out a king snake and cottonmouth, all in a ball, and placed them on the lawn. They were in mortal combat. The king snake is a constructor and immune to the poison of the cottonmouth. He tightened his body around his opponent, wound him in a ball, and squeezed the life out of him. Then he straightened his body and pulled him apart. Usually a king snake will eat its prey.

Needless to say, I enjoyed my young life at the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse and the good memories of that life. Writing this has energized the computer in my mind and when the right button was pressed, all these things came back about what had happened over a span of almost seventy years.

The good times and further memories of life at Cape Hatteras Lighthouse came to an end in September, 1933. In late August of that year a severe storm hit the coast of North Carolina with not too much damage, and as we had experienced storms of this magnitude before, not too much concern was expressed. We'd had a very dry summer that year and the ponds surrounding the area were bone dry and the bottom even cracked, like a desert. The storm hit and the surging seas came rolling across the broad, flat beach. The empty ponds were able to take care of the overwash, and in a little while things were beginning to look normal again. However, the worst was yet to come. My father received word via telephone from down south that a real severe storm (we didn't call them hurricanes then) was moving up the coast packing winds of one hundred miles per hour, and would hit Hatteras Island full force. He knew

this storm could be a killer and most especially so, since we had not fully recovered from the previous one a few weeks earlier. He moved us to the village of Buxton and instructed the two assistant keepers to do the same with their families. The three keepers stayed with their station. Lighthouse keepers could not leave their responsibility behind for any reason, even if their lives were in jeopardy. Immediate dismissal would be the result.

This storm proved to be as expected, and damage was severe, especially to the lower floors and furnishings. The sea busted down the door in our house and even turned a large, round, oak dining room table bottom up. Everything was one big mess. Some livestock drowned along the outer banks. Of course, back then, you could not see much physical damage along the beach because there was not anything such as buildings, only a Life Saving Station every seven miles.

There were six inlets cut along the Carolina coast during these two storms, two on Hatteras Island. We never returned to the lighthouse quarters again, but to each of us, it was always home, and still is to this day.

The End

Rany Jennette joined the U.S. Coast Guard a few years after high school, and was assigned to the Cutter Hamilton in 1941. In January 1942 he was detached to training school, thus narrowly missing the last voyage of the Hamilton, which was torpedoed off Iceland near the end of that month. Later he reached the rank of Chief Petty Officer on the subchaser 83328, patrolling off the Virginia coast, and served aboard the destroyer escort Lansing off North Africa until 1944.

Rany spent nearly 25 years working in a variety of capacities around the country, finally returning to Buxton in 1970, to manage the municipal water system. In 1984 he joined the National Park Service staff as a seasonal ranger at the Cape Hatteras Light Station, and proceeded to share his unique stories of life at the lighthouse with tens of thousands of visitors. In 1995 he married Volunteer Lynn O'Neill in a ceremony at the lighthouse.

In April, 1998, Rany suffered a serious stroke, bringing a halt to his rangering days. But his personal story lives on, in his own words, in this manuscript, which was adapted for use in 'Lighthouse Families,' by Bruce and Cheryl Roberts; and in a video, 'Lives of the Keepers,' produced by Volunteers at the Cape Hatteras Light Station Historic District.

Editing of this text was performed only where necessary for clarity or completeness.